Interview with Vincent A. Kordack, 6th Naval Beach Battalion, hospital corpsman present at Omaha Beach, 6 June 1944. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Navy Medical Department, 6/13/00.

When did you enlist in the Navy?

I have some of the facts right here in front of me. I enlisted in the Navy on December 1, 1942. I did my boot camp training at Bainbridge, MD, and also went to corps school there. I was there for 6 months and then was transferred to the 6th Naval Beach Battalion as a pharmacist's mate third class.

According to Mike Hall, our company commander, he had me listed with about 30 men and we were supposed to land in France on H plus 210 minutes. That would have put us on the beach somewhere around 9:00. I have no idea what time it was; I didn't have a wrist watch at the time. I have no idea whether or not we were on schedule. Our LCT was a couple of miles off the coast.

When I got into the LCT I was all the way aft so I didn't see anything forward. We maneuvered around in circles for how long I have no idea. It might have been an hour; it might have been 2 hours, but I know we were far from the beach. All of a sudden a boat pulled alongside, asked us whether we were engineers, and then told us to go on in.

We were maybe 50 or 100 yards from the beach when we stopped and unloaded.

How deep was it?

I was the last off the craft and I was up to my waist. They were already loading casualties on. The first casualty I saw was a man with one arm shot off and he was holding it in the air. And then all of a sudden I heard '88s and they were overshooting the LCT. I got on the beach and took off my medical pack and everything I had. The first person I saw was a young man I knew from the marshaling area. He was a pharmacist's mate second class--Rickenback, from New Jersey. I noticed that he had a bullet hole through his helmet. At that time where I was there was no small arms fire so I had no idea whether they had cleaned up the beach and up on the hills or whether something else had happened. The person I started speaking with was a doctor. Later on, I found out it was Mike Hall who was standing beside me and I told him there was nothing that could be done for Rickenback.

He was dead?

Yes. The shot was right through his helmet.

I'd like you to go back just for a moment. The man, Rickenback--was he Dr. Borden's litter mate?

I think he may have been. That might have been Dr. Borden there talking with me instead of Mike Hall. I met Rickenback back in the marshaling area. He was not B company. For some reason, we got very close. We were sitting in a tent talking and so forth and he said, "Vince, I'm not gonna come home. This is it. I'm not gonna make it." I always think of that because he was the first casualty I saw that day.

I then moved along the beach. As I said, at that time there was no small arms fire but they were dropping mortars or '88s. The first thing I did was to find things to use to make a fox hole or something. You could not dig in the ground; it was all gravel. Then I got up and began walking the beach taking care of casualties. Every once in a while the Germans began hitting the

beach with ‘88s. This went on for I don’t know how long, maybe an hour and a half or two hours.

Then all of a sudden everything stopped--no firing. At that particular time there was an LCI loaded with GI’s who were yelling. It had been hit. A boy took off all his clothes, took a rope, and went out there. He was from B Company, 6th Beach Battalion. He went out there with this rope and we pulled all the men from the boat.

From that point on, the Germans would shell us every once in a while but as far as I could tell there was no more small arms fire. There must have been eight or nine of us standing on the beach helping these guys come in. In that particular area none of us were hit.

During that day we had two officers from my platoon, LTJG Wade, who was Beachmaster, and the Assistant Beachmaster, ENS Allison. They were both killed. When I look back at my notes here I did not land with either one of them. According to the schedule I have here, I was supposed to have landed with LTJG Ludwig, communication and Dr. Collier, medical. I have no idea how they divided us up for landing. In fact, the bosun’s mate for B6, Mario Mesa, isn’t even listed on my landing roster.

Periodically, we were shelled. I treated some casualties. I don’t know how many. But later on that afternoon, things really quieted down on Easy Red. I guess the Army had cleared the top of the bluff as far as small arms fire was concerned.

About 8 or 9 o’clock Mesa came to us and told us we were supposed to move up to the hill. There was no more we could do down where we were. There was one path leading up to the hill and that path is still there right next to that bunker. And top of that path is the Croix de Guerre, a French monument. It was an ‘88 bunker and you could see right where a shell had gone right through and destroyed everything in it. We ended up using it as a headquarters for the 6th Beach Battalion.

That night we moved up to the hill and dug in. Messer told us we were on standby because we might have to pull out. To this day, I don’t know what he meant by that. So we dug in. Before we went up that path in the dark, there were slit trenches along that path and they were working with flashlights. I don’t know whether they were Army or Navy doctors. We were not asked to help so we just went up the hill.

About 2 in the morning I finally figured out what happened. The Army was maybe a half mile inland and they were pinned down. Somehow they broke through and that was it. And then a plane of two came over and dropped some bombs. Some of the guys said they were strafing. Keep one thing in mind. On D-Day itself, after we landed, there were no more boats coming in. In other words, we were isolated on the beach. That LCT was the last to come in and take casualties off.

The next day boats were coming in and what we were doing most of the time was taking casualties to these landing craft.

With litter teams?

Right. Actually anybody who was around carried litters when you needed them. I and Jerome Ginsberg, a hospital apprentice, carried casualties. Let me give you a list of the corpsmen from my platoon. Aiesi, PhM1c; Kordack, PhM3c; Lamar, PhM2c (I think Lamar was killed.); Snyder, HA1c; Ginsberg, HA1c; Green, HA1c; Dominico, HA1c. These are the men I landed with on D-Day. Mesa is not listed here and I have no idea how he caught up with us.

The next day we came down out of the hills and started cleaning up. In other words there were some casualties there. We rebandaged and regrouped. There was a rhino barge up on the

beach waiting for high tide. I went down to the barge and it was completely covered with litter cases from all the way forward aft on both port and starboard side. You couldn't walk between them. I decided to go down and try to help any way I could. I still see this one guy on the end. I don't who he is, blood all over the place; the litter was just covered with blood and he was asking for help. At that time, I have no idea why, how, when, but the Germans started dropping '88s again. And they were dropping on both sides of us so I got out of there. That is the last time I recall anything from that second day. On the third day, we corpsmen were finished. We had nothing to do.

What did the beach look like at that time?

I've tried to remember this thing. I've tried to picture it. I went to see "The Longest Day," and that didn't refresh my mind in any way. I also saw "Saving Private Ryan." I do not recall such a disastrous type of battle.

That you saw in "Private Ryan?"

Right. I don't recall anything like that on D-Day. Keep in mind that I have no idea. There was shelling and firing where I landed and I did treat some wounded. What always amazes me is I don't recall that many wounded on Easy Red. They were coming down over the hill on litters to be taken out by landing craft and I've tried to visualize this, but I have no idea why my mind is a blank. Maybe I just don't want to remember it; I don't know.

What happened then?

I was transferred to the Pacific and sailed on the USS *Kent* (APA-217) and participated in two invasions. Each ship had a platoon of corpsmen and doctors and we landed with the Army. I landed on Leyte and Okinawa. After we landed on Okinawa there was nothing going on so we went back to the ship and came home.